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ABSTRACT

Although the current move away from sequential isolated skill and drill instruction in reading may be good, the growing concern to accommodate individual learner styles may lead to unnecessary complications if teachers attempt to adapt instruction to their more than 30 students each day. If an instructional program is rich enough, it will provide sufficient diversity to meet the needs of all learners, and comprehensive instructional models that allow for such diversity have been developed. Examples include the Reading Strategy Lessons, which are part of a student-centered, comprehension-based language arts manual being field tested by teachers in kindergarten through grade six. They include a variety of activities specifically targeted for the four different learner types described by D. Kolb in 1976; (1) diverger (the feeler/watcher)--reads a story with a variety of elements; (2) assimilator (the watcher/thinker)--breaks into groups and discusses each element; (3) converger (the thinker/doer)--writes stories; and (4) accommodator (the doer/feeler)--reads report to class. (Diagrams of Learner Styles/Learner Strategies and reading strategy lessons are included.) (LLZ)

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LEARNER STYLES AND STRATEGY LESSONS:

A LITTLE SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

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LEARNING STYLES AND STRATEGY LESSONS

> We're beginning to break the shackles imposed by complex reading systems, placement tests, and readability formulas . . . and many teachers now favor the new emphasis on student-centered reading comprehension.
>
> (Learning, April/May, 1985, 14-17.)
>
> These days, educators are paying serious attention to the learning environment that best suits an individual child . . . and a few are probing teachers learning styles as well.
>
> (Better Homes and Gardens, May 1985, 28.)

When information from educational research surfaces like the tip of the iceberg in popular magazines, one can assume the implications are, or soon will be, felt in classrooms everywhere.

However good the current move away from sequential isolated skill and drill instruction in reading is, the growing concern for individual learner styles may lead to unnecessary complications if teachers beleive they have to adapt instructions differently for all thirty plus (30+) of their students each day. We believe that when the instructional program is rich enough, there is sufficient diversity to meet the learning style needs of all the children.

This article briefly discusses one approach to learning style and presents two reading strategy lessons at different levels to

show what prefered learner style is being encouraged during each component of the lesson. The notion that we should teach to a child's preferred learning style only serves to allow the other facets of learning to atrify. Instructional programs that provide a little something for everyone invite children to more fully develop all ways of knowing.

Learning Styles

The concept of individual learning styles has indeed received much attention in the last few years. Together with the wealth of research on the general nature of human learning, questions concerning individual learner characteristics are being explored. Are there significant differences in how individuals learn? If so, can a limited and useful taxonomy of categories be identified? If such a set of descriptors is validated, how should that affect classroom practice?

Our understanding of the general nature of human learning is expanding. During the fifties and sixties prevalent descriptions of learning reflected a behavioral perspective, e.g. the process by which an activity originates through the organism reacting to an encountered situation providing nothing else accounts for the change such as maturation, fatigue, etc. (Hilgard and Bower, 1966). Curriculum refleted this perspective in increasingly complex systems for isolated skills instruction.

Currently, research is producing more cognitive views of human learning, e.g., any change in one's cognitive structure

(Smith, 1975); a process involving a quality of personal involvement with some essential meaning (Rogers, 1979); a complex set of factors involving the learner, the learning activity, the material, and the critical task (Bransford, 1979). Therefore, never curriculum is beginning to explore ways to engage children in real reading and writing and to invite them to examine the cognitive and language processes they are using.

This shift in the descriptions of learning from an emphasis on behavior to an emphasis on cognitive processing is what has prompted much of the work into the ways individual learners come to know (Dunn and Dunn, 1978; Gregorc, 1979; Fry and Kolb, 1979).

One attempt to validate the concept of individual learning styles is Kolb's (1976) Learning Style Inventory. Based on what is referred to as experiental learning theory, this instrument is designed to measure four learner strategies--whether a person emphasizes abstractness or concreteness and action or reflection as they learn. According to Kolb, an individual's responses pinpoint him/her as one of four primary learner types (diverger, assimilator, converger, accommodator) from a combination of any two adjacent strategies (see Figure One).

(Insert Figure One)

Expanding on Kolb's work, in an effort to further clarify and apply individual learning styles research, McCarthy and Lefler (1983) offer the following descriptions of each of the four learner types.

(Insert Figure Two)

Not surprisingly, some investigators have suggested that various instructional approaches be identified as to the learner category they support so that materials and tasks can be presented in a way which is appropriate to the assessed style of each student (Dunn and Dunn, 1978; Randolph and Posner, 1979; and others). Such a recommendation seems, unnecessary, unwieldly, and pedagogically unsound. Curricular changes should never narrow or otherwise limit instructional experiences for any child.

Rather, they should enrich and expand. Consider the following three points: First, researchers in learning styles maintain that each learner can employ all styles--that learners merely tend to emphasize, feel more comfortable with, or approach the world most often from one of the four quadrants (Kolb, 1976). Further, it seems likely that a characteristic of good learners is that they have learned to modify their natural preference relative to their understanding of the task. This implies that good learners have benefited from a variety of instructional experiences.

Secondly, there remains a dirth of solid empirical data identifying one specific instructional program or procedure as more effective than another. This is certainly true for reading (Jenkins and Pany, 1980). Therefore, many educators maintian that, until such time as we have better hard data relative to specific approaches which optimize an individual's

learning, the best learning results when classroom instruction a) provides a variety of ways to engage the learner with the content, and b) provides a variety of strategies that focus on the processes involved in comprehending (Berliner and Rosenshine, 1977; Goodman and Goodman, 1981; Brown, 1980; Moe and Babbs et. al., 1983; Mason, 1984; and others).

Finally, there are individual learner styles and there are individual teacher styles as well. For example, if some individuals prefer to learn by observing and listening, then reflecting on their observations, those same persons would tend to teach by telling--with children acting as passive receivers because that's what such a teacher believes to be the most natural (McCarthy and Lefler, 1983).

According to Harste and Burke (1977), teachers have a theoretical orientation to the reading process and their teaching reflects their basic beliefs about language learning and literacy. Since there is also data to suggest that teachers present material, emphasize aspects of content, and design instructional tasks reflective of their own assessed learning styles (Dunn, 1982), teachers may need help in designing lessons that support all learner styles.

Strategy Lessons

Reading/language arts classrooms in which the instructional program is based on only one learner/teacher style, or a curriculum which fails to reflect current cognitive and process

oriented instruction may fail to support the full development of each learner. That is, they may not provide that rich variety of stimuli which engage the learner in several ways with the content and invite him/her to explore comprehending/communicating processes from a variety of perspectives.

More comprehensive instructional models which provide something for all learners would seem to be a better solution than instruction which reflects only one style or otherwise limits the curriculum. Such comprehensive instructional models for the language arts are variously presented in Smith, Goodman and Meredith (1976); Gage (1976); Goodman and Burke (1980); Ringler and Weber (1984); and others. Comprehensive strategy lessons provide something for all learner styles, incorporate all four language strands (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and allow teachers to expand their repertoire of approaches and their creativity as well. (See NCTE's Livewire) The RSL format generally consists of four major phases:

Rationale: Why the lesson has been prepared.

Specifying: Who the lesson is designed to benefit. (the group or type of reader)

Instruction:
a. Initiating the lesson.
b. Interacting with the students about what they have done, how they did it, etc.
c. Application, either in small groups, independently, etc.

Expansion: Varied activities for expanding language, thinking, and communicating processes and which are logical next steps in the lesson.

The following are sample Reading Strategy Lessons adapted or developed by the authors. They are currently part of a student-centered, comprehension-based language arts inservice manual being field tested by teachers (K-6) in a state-supported basic skills project for disadvantaged children in Middle Tennessee. The circle graph following each lesson shows the learner style (according to descriptions found in Figure Two) which is most emphasized during various phases of the lesson. Lesson one is appropriate for grades K-1, while the second lesson would fit an intermediate grade levels (2-4).

(Insert Figure Three)

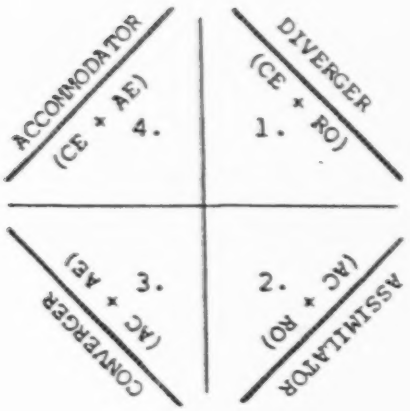
If individual learner styles is a valid concept, such reading strategy lessons easily provide for them as they focus on expanding student's comprehension and production of written material. Each lesson clearly incorporates a variety of experiences which help children gain control over written language as they explore how language works.

They are created for specific learning needs and interests of children and avoid the trap of allowing textbooks and tests to structure the curriculum. They are fun for children and teachers, too!

FIGURE ONE
Learner Styles/Learner Strategies

CONCRETE
EXPERIENCES
Learner involves him/herself fully in new experiences.
(Feeler)

ACTIVE
EXPERRIMENTATION
Learner uses theories to solve problems and make deicisions.
(Doer)



REFLECTIVE
OBSERVATION
Learner observes and reflects on the experiences from different perspectives.
(Watcher)

ABSTRACT
CONCEPTUALIZING
Learner creates concepts, tests them and integrates his/her observations into sound theories.
(Thinker)

(Composite from: Kolb, 1976; Claxton and Ralston, 1978, McCarthy and Lefler, 1983.)

FIGURE TWO
LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS AND ATTRIBUTES

Accommodator

Type Four (The Doer/Feeler): These learners score highest in active experimentation and concrete experiences. They need to know what varieties of things can be done, lern by trial and error, develop and carry out plans, excel at self-discovery, perceive information concretely and process it actively. They like variety, excel in situations calling for flexibility, tend to take risks, are at ease with people, and often reach accurate conclusions in the absence of logical justification.

Strength: They forge ahead, carrying out plans of action.

Weakness: May forge ahead on the wrong thing and may not complete tasks on time.

Favorite Question: If?

Diverger

Type One (The Feeler/Watcher): These learners score high o concrete experiences and reflective observation. They ten to readily integrate experience with self, seek meaning an clarity, need to be personally involved, and learn best by listening and sharing ideas. They perceive information concretely and process it by thinking about it. They are the divergent thinkers who believe in their own experiences.

Strength: They are idea people, creative and imaginative.

Weakness: They tend to be stymied by alternatives and they do not readily see problems or opportunities.

Favorite Question: Why?

Converger

Type Three (The Thinker/Doer): These learners score highest on abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. They need to know how things work, focusing on the single best way to solve a problem. They tend to be very practical, learn by testing their theories, are skills oriented, perceive information abstractly, and test it by using it. They use factual data to build concepts, need real hands-on experiences, enjoy solving problems, and resent being given answers. They want to know how things have practical application.

Strength: These people are good decision-makers, and they excel in the practical application of ideas.

Weakness: They don't test out their theories and often come to premature decisions.

Favorite Question: How does this work?

Assimilator

Type Two (The Watcher/Thinker): These learners score highest on reflective observation and abstract conceptualization. They tend to do well with theories and concepts, seek facts and continuity, need to know what the experts think, are goal oriented, need details, and learn by thinking through ideas. They like information and collect data. They are thorough and industrious, and they enjoy traditional classrooms. Schools were designed for these learners. Schools were designed for these learners.

Strength: These learners need intellectual recognition and excel at creating concepts, models, and theories even when no practical result is clear.

Weakness: They may plan too many theories with no practical application.

Favorite Question: What?

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FIGURE THREE

I. BEGINNING READING STRATEGY LESSON

Letters We Have Known and Loved

Why: This activity is designed to give children direct experience with letter/sound relationships and with the distinctive features of letters from a meaning base.

Who: All kindergarten children can benefit from this lesson, but it is especially good for youngsters who have limited experience with print.

How: These lessons should follow explorations in whole alphabet through such books as O Is For Duck by Elting and A My Name is Alice by Bayer.

a. The teacher provides several letter shapes for the letter being studied. (Cut from stiff paper 50 letter "T".) Then the teacher reads a story to the children with several examples of the letter being studied. (Letter should occur in initial position most often.)

EX: The Teeny Tiny Woman by Seuling
Little Toot by Gramatky
Terrible Troll by Mayer
etc.

b. The children hear the story and read along several times. Teacher directs a discussion on all the words that begin with the same letter. Have the children look back into the text for examples.

c. Children engage in a letter hunt for all of the "T's" the teacher has hidden in the room, hallway, etc. the children look through magazines and newspapers for words that start with the letter. The children bring to class signs and labels, songs or stories with multiple examples of the letter. Teacher can provide real examples such as TIDE, TOOTSIE ROLL, etc.

Then:

1. Children write their own story such as "The Teeny Tiny Termite," "Terrible Tiger," "Tommy the Trumpet," "Teddy Bear's Tumble," etc. (Children dictate and teacher writes for children to read.)

2. Children bring in pictures from magazines or things that begin with the letter.

3. Children make up a scenario for how the letter got its name. (Teacher writes as children dictate.)

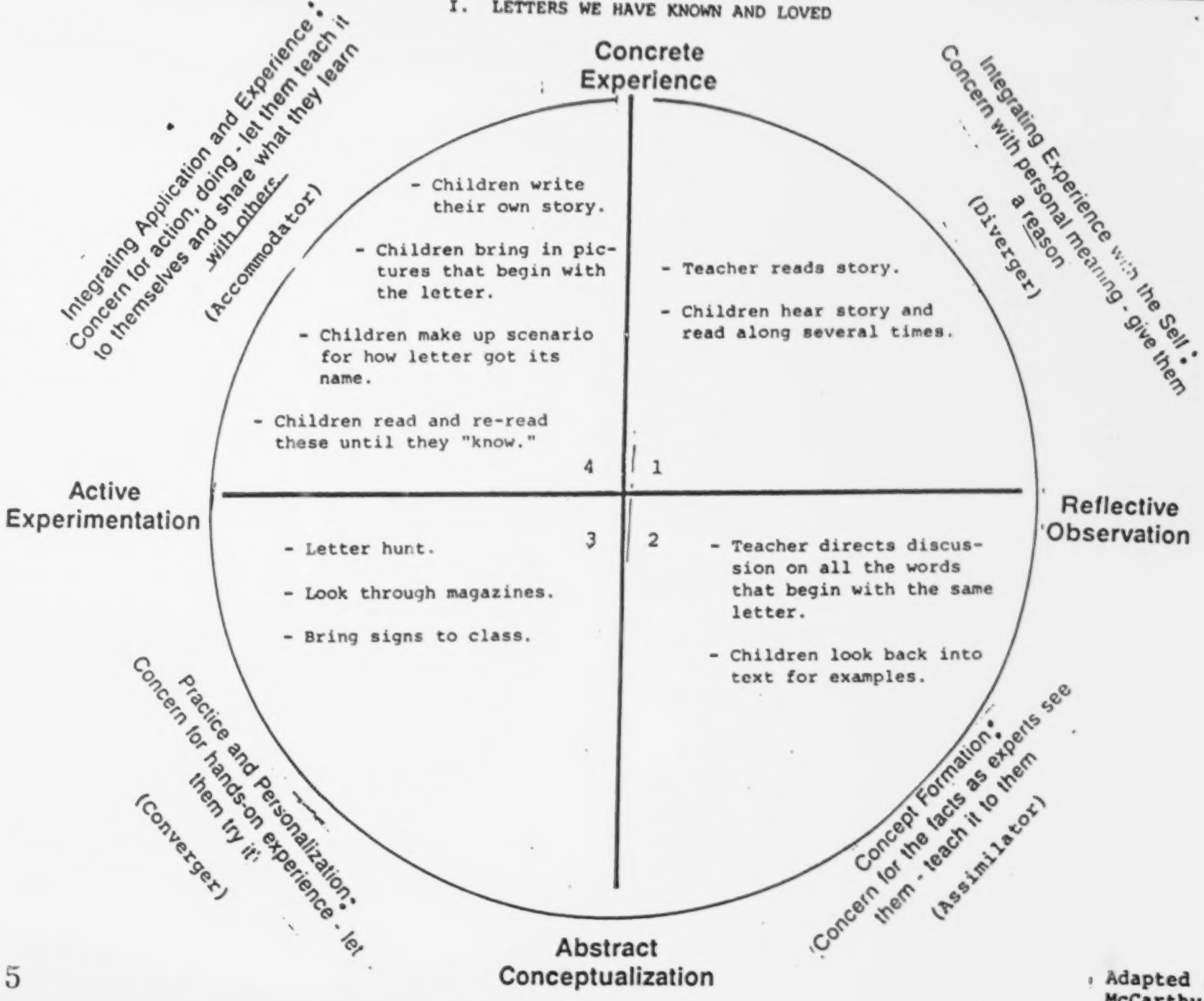
4. Teacher provides children with copies of songs, rhymes, tongue-twisters, etc., which emphasize the letter being studied. Children read and re-read these until they "know" them.

5. Teacher helps children keep a list of words which begin with that letter. The list is posted in a prominent place in the room and added to as the children find words they want to put on their list. The list can be used when children want to write their own rhymes, tongue-twisters, and stories.

6. Add your own ideas . . .

7. Repeat for as many letters of the alphabet as you choose.

I. LETTERS WE HAVE KNOWN AND LOVED


Concrete Experience
Integrating Application and Experience
Concern for action, doing - let them teach it to themselves and share what they learn with others
(Accommodator)
Integrating Experience with the Self
Concern with personal meaning - give them a reason
(Diverger)
- Children write their own story.
- Children bring in pictures that begin with the letter.
- Children make up scenario for how letter got its name.
- Children read and re-read these until they "know."
- Teacher reads story.
- Children hear story and read along several times.
Active Experimentation
Reflective Observation
4
1
3
2
- Letter hunt.
- Look through magazines.
- Bring signs to class.
- Teacher directs discussion on all the words that begin with the same letter.
- Children look back into text for examples.
Practice and Personalization
Concern for hands-on experience - let them try it
(Converger)
Concept Formation
Concern for the facts as experts see them - teach it to them
(Assimilator)
Abstract Conceptualization

Adapted from McCarthy and Leflar, 1983.

II. INTERMEDIATE READING STRATEGY LESSON

Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral

Why: Categorizing and classifying is fundamental to learning. This lesson helps children view the world in terms of major categories.

Who: All children will benefit from this lesson, especially those whose vocabularies are limited or whose world seems random and unpredictable.

How: a. Read a story to the group. Select one that has a variety of elements. Recommendations include:

Dragon Stew by McGovan
Strega Nona by dePaola
Me and My Flying Machine by Mayer
The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate The Wash by Noble
Huge Harold by Peet
The Mysterious Tadpole by Kellogg
. . . and so on.

b. Discuss and enjoy.

c. Break into small groups or pairs. Provide students with the following:

Animal	Vegetable	Mineral

Discuss each category. Show picture examples of each classification. Direct children to look back into the story you've just read and find examples for each category. Remind the children that some items may fit into more than one classification.

Ex: Paintbrush may be both part vegetable (wooden handle), part mineral (metal band around brush), part animal (if the brush is of animal hair.)

If you wish to, see which groups can get most items. Time may also be kept. Let the group share and compare, each group presenting one or two ideas at a time.

Then:

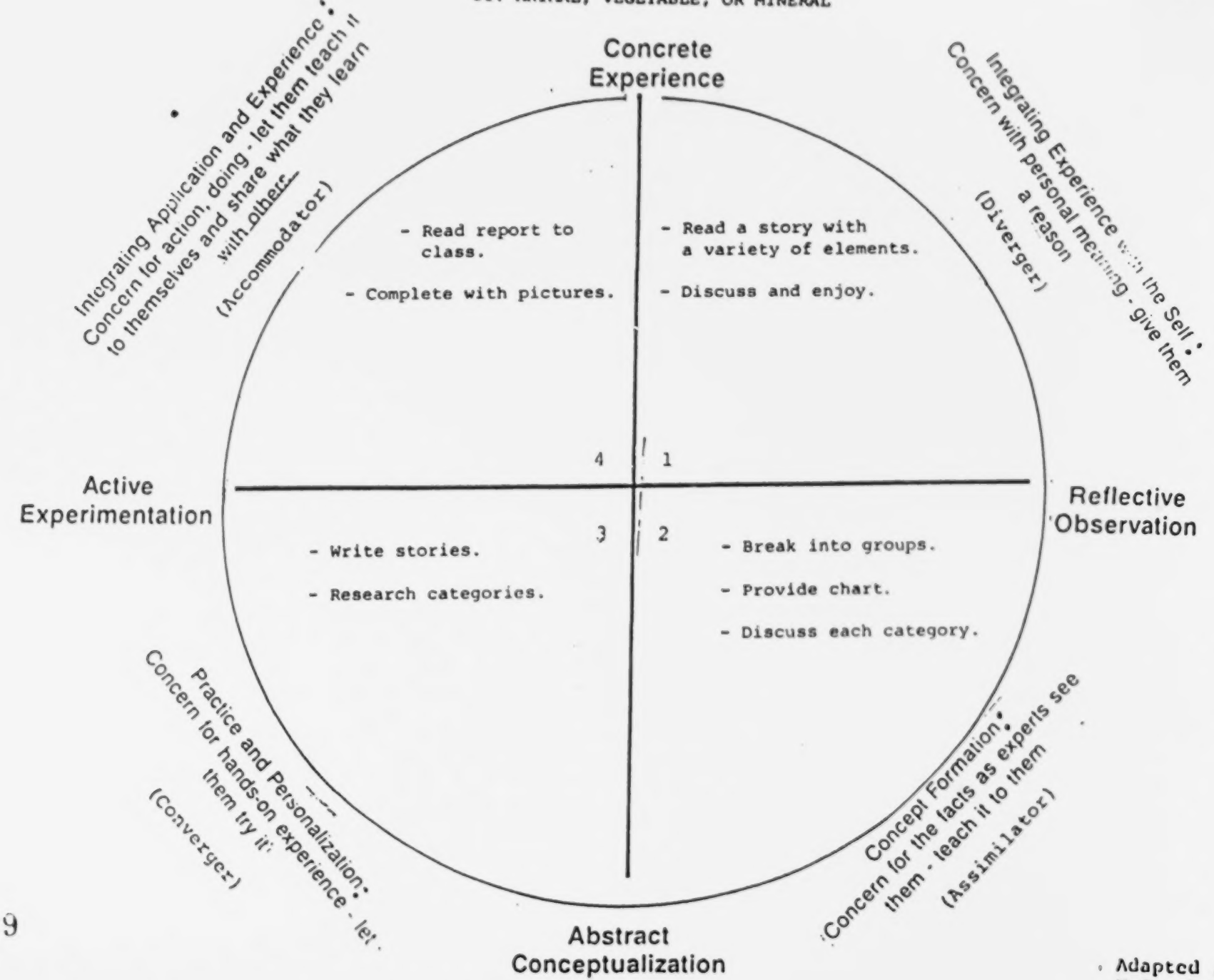
1. Repeat with another story for each group.

2. Write "animal-vegetable-mineral" stories. Encourage humor. Story starters could include: My Pet Rock Can Talk! or When Donkeys Fly.

3. Divide the class into three groups and have each group research one of the three categories. To extend information, have them prepare for a report for the class, complete with pictures--samples and examples of unusual items.

4. Play the old 20 questions process of elimination game.

5. This is a simple but effective lead-in to concept mapping activities. (See Learning to Learn by Govin.)


Concrete Experience
Integrating Application and Experience
Concern for action, doing - let them teach it to themselves and share what they learn with others
(Accommodator)
Integrating Experience with the Self
Concern with personal meaning - give them a reason
(Diverger)
- Read report to class.
- Complete with pictures.
- Read a story with a variety of elements.
- Discuss and enjoy.
4
1
Active Experimentation
Reflective Observation
3
2
- Write stories.
- Research categories.
- Break into groups.
- Provide chart.
- Discuss each category.
Practice and Personalization
Concern for hands-on experience - let them try it
(Converger)
Concept Formation
Concern for the facts as experts see them - teach it to them
(Assimilator)
Abstract Conceptualization

Adapted from McCarthy and Leflar, 1983.

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